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Deposited in DRO:

25 August 2017

Version of attached file:

Published Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Mack, Michael (2003) 'German idealism and the Jew : the inner anti-semitism of philosophy and German Jewish responses.', Chicago : University of Chicago Press.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/G/bo3645200.html>

Publisher's copyright statement:

Additional information:

Sample chapter deposited. Chapter 1: 'Positing immutability in Religion: Kant', pp. 23-41.

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Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth.

—CORMAC MCCARTHY, *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

In the introduction I briefly examined the culmination of the German idealist fantasy about an immutable tie between Jehovah and his people. The following two chapters analyze how the construction of this prejudicial image grew out of Kant's and Hegel's respective philosophies.

In this chapter, I first discuss the epistemological foundations of Kant's moral and political philosophy. In his rational theology and moral thought, he gave a prejudicial account of Judaism. The adverse force of the charges Kant leveled against the Jews was intensified in his anthropology. How can we explain this intensification in the context of a more sociological (that is, anthropological) discussion? In his moral and religious philosophy Kant discussed mainly Judaism, but in his anthropological writing he focused on the "the Jewish nation." We will see in what sense these two entities, religion and nation, coincide in Kant's characterization of the Jews.

What could have caused such a conflation of politics and religion in the work of a philosopher who, one would have thought, took great care to differentiate between these two entities? Kant, following a one-sided reading of Spinoza, argued that Judaism is a religion without religion. He unmasked the essence of Judaism as a form of politics. However, Kant's moral philosophy incorporated a strong political—in the sense of public—agenda. Was it not concerned with the social validity of individual performances? After all, the famous categorical imperative demands the public applicability of each individual action. What did it mean when he wrote that Judaism is a religion without religion whose very essence consists of politics?

An exclusive focus on Kant's moral philosophy and rational theology does not suffice. Whereas critics have so far only examined the passages in which Kant discussed Judaism and the Jews, this chapter offers a hermeneu-

tics of his prejudicial discourse within the context in which he developed it. Thus, an analysis of Kant's epistemological critique of traditional metaphysics helps us understand his redefined metaphysical perspective on social, moral, and political issues.

In Kant's view, a Jewish way of life could not transcend empirical conditions. This question as to the possibility of independence from material considerations formed the very heart of Kant's critique of traditional metaphysics. The *Critique of Pure Reason* set out to prove that we can neither recognize the intrinsic worth of any material thing nor ascertain the existence of some supernatural sign system that could bestow spiritual or intellectual value on it. The only way in which we can meaningfully deal with the external world is by imposing the laws derived from autonomous reason on nature. Natural appearance offers the material from which we can build a universe according to the free and consistent plans generated by rational operations.

In the second part of this chapter, I examine how Kant constructed this epistemological notion of an autonomous rationality with reference to traditional Christian rhetoric in his moral philosophy and rational theology. This will shed light on the way his reformulation of metaphysics went hand in hand with his attempt to do away with the Jewish foundations of Christianity. We will see that a secularized notion of Kant's image of Christ informed his account of autonomous reason. Autonomous reason, in turn, established the guidelines for rational action in Kant's enunciation of a non-contingent body politic. The politicization and concomitant secularization of the Christian plea for a transcendence of worldly interests points to the pseudotheology that manifests itself in Kant's prejudicial discourse about the Jews. In this pseudotheology Kant constructed the image of an immutable union between Jehovah and his people that informed German anti-Semitic discourse from Hegel via Feuerbach and Schopenhauer to Wagner. It is this pseudotheological discourse about the essence of Judaism that reappeared in pseudoscientific anti-Semitic fantasies at the end of the nineteenth century.

Kant's Refashioning of Metaphysics

In an idiosyncratic way, Kant and the German philosophers who followed him proceeded to define *freedom* in terms of liberation from one's inclination to depend on objects in the empirical world.¹ Kant's distinctive transcendental revolution consisted of precisely establishing a radical divide between "the world of nature and the world of freedom."² In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant laid the epistemological foundations for his moral and political philosophy. He did so as an apparently "empiricist" move. He debunked traditional metaphysics in that he called into question the certainty of any rela-

tion between a physical object and a metaphysical sign system that Western thought had so far attributed to it.

In this way, he criticized his philosophical predecessor Leibniz for "*intellectualizing* appearances" (*Leibniz intellektuierte die Erscheinungen*).³ To some extent, Kant's notion of appearances denoted mere physical objects as they appear to our sensibility. Although this term did not necessarily imply a value judgment, it nevertheless referred to the empirical world in terms of a purely bodily constitution that lacks any inherently spiritual or intrinsically intellectual referent.

Whereas metaphysics before Kant assumed an underlying meaning, that is to say, a "thing in itself" behind "the thing," the *Critique of Pure Reason* radically broke with such a correlation between the physical and the metaphysical. We could not know anything about either the supernatural or the natural. Therefore we had to cease asking questions as to the hidden signification of empirical objects.⁴ This seemed to indicate a philosophical affinity with materialism.⁵ However, the introduction of epistemological limits was concerned with the perception of a spiritual world. An empirical world only fulfills the function of the first step on the long road toward making human reason the heir of a metaphysical tradition, a tradition that had been debunked in its "old," that is, correlating constitution. We are unable to recognize "things" as they exist "in themselves." This does not, however, eventuate in materialism. Rather, "reason" (*Verstand*) is not limited by sensuousness but, on the contrary, limits the sensuous precisely by calling things in themselves noumena and not phenomena or appearances.⁶ Instead of pointing to the signification behind phenomena *noumena* goes under the name of "an unknown something" (*eines unbekannten Etwas*).⁷

This limitation concerning the perceptibility of both mere things (appearances) and things in themselves (noumena) liberates human reason from a reliance on both the natural and the supernatural worlds. We will see in the course of this chapter how Kant, via his discussion of a Jewish way of life, exemplified what he meant by such dependence on the external world, namely, heteronomy. Here it is important to emphasize that he set radical limits on human epistemology so that it would not circumscribe the capacity of human knowledge. The human inability both to understand the meaning of the empirical world and to ascertain the existence of a supernatural one instead enthroned "reason itself" as "the source of natural laws" (*der Verstand ist selbst der Quell der Gesetze der Natur*).⁸

Kant introduced a radical split between being (ontology) and meaning (morality) not because he wanted to shut the door on a moral order in its entirety. Rather, he set fundamental limits on human epistemology with a view to freeing human autonomy from a dependence either on the external natural world or on a thus far metaphysically assumed transcendent world that endowed the immanent world with meaning. Whereas traditional metaphysics

mediated between immanence and transcendence so as to be able to assure a meaningful relation between humanity and its place in nature, Kant redefined the metaphysical in terms of human autonomy. Autonomous reason uses the contingent empirical world as the basic material by means of which it, in an a priori manner, constructs a new rational world that gradually progresses toward immanent perfection.⁹

Thus, for Kant, “the whole of philosophical knowledge based on pure reason in systematic coordination . . . is called metaphysics” (*die ganze . . . philosophische Erkenntnis aus reiner Vernunft im systematischen Zusammenhang . . . heißt Metaphysik*).¹⁰ Therefore, Kant’s epistemological critique set the stage for his metaphysical redefinition of the body and the body politic. Given that we do not know the possible meaning of bodily objects, it also could not be said with certainty that these contingent entities have any relation to a transcendent ground that would bestow on them some form of value. Our nonempirical, that is to say, rational, activity operates as the true and only source of moral validity.

The Politics of Metaphysics

In what way does this critique of metaphysics precondition Kant’s exclusion of the Jews from his definition of an “ideal” body politic? The political dimensions of a Kantian epistemological revolution consisted in the demand for a social reconstruction of our sensuous inclinations—that is, of everything that pertains to our bodily constitution according to the moral law as laid down by autonomous reason. Mere reason (*Verstand*) synthesizes the variety of empirical objects by means of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*).¹¹ Pure reason (*Vernunft*) does its work along the lines of the metaphysical, as redefined by Kant. It overcomes any dependence on empirical objects, which are, apart from their mere material existence, nothing but products of representation.

As we shall see, the political dimension of Kant’s metaphysics of autonomous reason has important implications for his fantasy about the Jews as the embodiment of heteronomy. Within the discursive enunciation of a body politic operating according to the rationale of Kantian metaphysics, the body constitutes an entity that has to fall under the control of autonomous reason. Kant defined the epistemological as well as the political aspect of “freedom” as the independence of reason from one’s corporeal inclinations. Kant’s revolutionary wager consisted in the claim that the autonomy of reason from the body may be practiced within the context of the modern state. It is within this political context that a secularized Christian paradigm determined his discourse concerning Jews and Judaism. As Dieter Henrich has pointed out, Kant defined rational practice as the transcendence of practical interests:

“Only a practical reason which sufficed to determine the will to action for itself alone, and without regard to other, external, impulses, would be pure. It is Kant’s thesis that such reason really exists. Kant set the *Critique of Practical Reason* the task of refuting those who think that our reason can be practical only if it is at the same time empirically conditioned.”¹² In this chapter I examine the pseudothological paradigm behind this claim about practical reason’s freedom from material interests. This paradigm comes clearly to the fore when Kant focuses his discussion on the Jews as a community. The mere body was incapable of participating in a body politic whose idealist stake resided in the overcoming of corporeal conditions. Crucially, it is this divide between the body (nature) and the body politic (freedom) that has political implications. To this extent, nature can only be overcome by an identification of bare life with politics. What describes the workings of this idealist body politic is that it subjects a totality of bodies within a specific group to its symbolic order. The rules of this order are valid but not meaningful. Instead, they are significant only insofar as they are able to utterly change the very nature of the empirically constituted body. In this way, the laws of the body politic are “being in force without significance.” Citing Gershom Scholem on Kafka, Giorgio Agamben has pinpointed in Kant the theoretical foundations of this modern law whose significance paradoxically consists in being nonsignificant: “In Kant the pure form of law as ‘being in force without significance’ appears for the first time in modernity. What Kant calls ‘the simple form of law’ (*die bloße Form des Gesetzes*) in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is in fact a law reduced to the zero point of significance, which is, nevertheless, in force as such.”¹³ The law of reason coincides with the reason of the law that is in force without significance. Kantian rationality, with its unbridgeable gulf between the realms of freedom and nature, sets out to demonstrate the worthlessness of bare life. Reason therefore dominates and overcomes nature by humiliating desires for objects in the external world. Kant’s law of autonomy helped enact such a subjugation of the body to the forces of the body politic. The next section examines the secularized and politicized Christian paradigm behind Kant’s account of freedom, reason, and the body politic.

Translating the “Otherworldly” into the “Worldly” Body Politic

Kant’s peculiar attempt to make a scientific explanation of the world compatible with the overcoming of the worldly set the stage for much of the tension that is characteristic of nineteenth-century German thought.¹⁴ As Yirmiyahu Yovel has recently pointed out, “the German *Aufklärung* differed from the French *Lumières* in that it did not oppose religious truth but tried to make it as rational as possible.”¹⁵ In contrast to the French deists, who “attacked religion in the name of reason, German Enlightenment thinkers tended to *rec-*

oncile reason with revelation, and did so mainly by having reason prove itself, on its own authority, the existence of God, free will, the immortality of the soul, and a moral order governing the world."¹⁶

But how did Kant attempt to reconcile the essence of Christianity with the rational? In his notion of autonomy he tried to harmonize secular reason with one element of Christian doctrine that prescribes the Christ-like dying away from the worldly. Kant maintained that the modern state acts according to the rationale of ethical autonomy when it forbids its subjects to give in to their inclinations toward "worldly goods" if these inclinations interfere with the commandments of its legal system. How are we able to explain this fusion of ethics with the politics of modern nations? Here it is worthwhile recalling that Kant separated concepts from intuitions. This separation causes some contradictions in his transcendental account, for it begs questions such as the following: If we are free from empirical necessities as rational beings who by virtue of their conceptual way of thinking can order the chaos of experience and legislate it in an autonomous manner, why then do we still need to be governed by laws of civil society that regulate the way we act in the world as intuitive beings, that is, as human beings who may be swayed by desires aroused by our perception or intuition of the empirical world?

As a consequence of this tension between concept and intuition, Kant constructed two different social models. One represents heteronomy, or a form of social interaction that is the reverse of the transcendental and conceptual and is therefore inclined to the empirical and toward the positivity of religion. In this type of society, a direct, intuitive response to particular empirical objects and likewise an intuition of received divine commandments shape the mental outlook of the people concerned. Whether intuition relates to empirical objects or to the objects produced by a religious imagination, it leans mainly toward positivity with respect to that which is outwardly and heteronomously given. Kant's description of a Jewish way of life, as we will see, fulfilled a function in his philosophy that at first seems to be marginal but is in fact related to the paradox that arises from the apparent discrepancy between his moral and his political philosophies. Robert Pippin has drawn attention to this conflict by asking, "[W]hy doesn't Kant, as a moralist, worry only about the moral permissibility of the exercise of state power; why does he try to establish that entry into a *Rechtstaat* is obligatory?"¹⁷ We are free and can establish rules legislating the natural world in an autonomous manner. In order to do so, we have to subscribe to the rules of a civil society. Here we happily abrogate our right to intuitive happiness, as aimed at in a heteronomously legislated society. We willingly follow the restrictions imposed on our empirical and material desires by obeying a strict "Mine-and-Yours" ownership and property distinction. Thus, the autonomy of the individual paradoxically presupposes a political system that enforces the idea of holding objects "intelligibly" rather than being determined by their sensible conditions.¹⁸ This paradox becomes less contradictory if we take into account

Kant's notion of freedom as liberation from reliance on empirical conditions. Indeed, the monetary and property laws of the early capitalist state helped enact Kant's understanding of autonomous rationality and did so in a way that combined the societal and the metaphysical. Thus the morality that informed the workings of post-Reformation nationhood prescribed, in Kant's view, a forgoing of "worldly" inclinations.

According to Kant, the body politic seems to reenact in a secular manner a somewhat Christian paradigm that proclaims salvation with a view to the renunciation of material interests. As early as the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant defined ethics as being "completely purged of anything empirical."¹⁹ He attributed unquestionable authority to laws and insisted that these must not be "reasoned against" (*zu vernünfteln*)²⁰ precisely because they had no relation to the empirical and therefore contingent, to the bodily and therefore imperfect. Rather, they had an a priori foundation in the autonomy of pure reason: "[A] law, if it is to be valid as morality, i.e., as grounds for compulsion, must command absolute necessity; . . . the grounds of compulsion must not be sought in the nature of humanity, or in the conditions of the world in which it is placed, but in an a priori manner in terms of pure reason."²¹ How does compulsion avoid a contradictory tension with freedom? If the force of the state proscribes a dispassionate relation to the material world, then it does not contradict but instead enacts Kant's definition of both freedom and autonomous reason.

It is against this background of a fusion of politics, ethics, and a secularized understanding of post-Reformation Christianity that in his famous *Response to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* Kant demanded of his "enlightened" readers: "[R]eason as much as you want and about whatever subject matter you choose, but obey!"²² In an important essay, Michel Foucault examined what the German word *räsonieren* means in the context of Kant's critical philosophy. It does not refer to the specific use of reason in relation to specific objects in the external world. Instead, it denotes the workings of autonomy: "Humanity will reach maturity when it is no longer required to obey, but when men are told: 'Obey, and you will be able to reason as much as you like.' We must note that the German word used here is *räsonieren*; this word, which is also used in the *Critiques*, does not refer to just any use of reason, but to a use of reason in which reason has no other object but itself: *räsonieren* is to reason for reasoning's sake."²³ This absence of an object describes the autonomy of reason. Political struggles are mainly concerned with the distribution of wealth, comprising an assembly of material objects. Kantian reason, however, proved its autonomy by being indifferent toward the external world. This indifference conditions the obedience to the commandments issued by political rulers. In this way, the word *räsonieren* differs from what Kant meant when he used the expression "to reason against" (*vernünfteln*).

To this extent, Kant paid attention to violence not as a threat to material

bodies but rather as a subversion of the rational order of things. His law attempted to preclude the revolutionary violence of those who rebel against a post-Reformation, capitalist state founded on the rationalization of money and property. It therefore acted against a violent return to what Kant called a "natural" state in which the earth was everyone's possession. The *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) characterized the primordial society as a kind of communism: "The whole of humanity originally enjoys the collective possession of the land of the whole earth (*communio fundi originaria*)" (*Alle Menschen sind ursprünglich in einem Gesamt-Besitz des Bodens der ganzen Erde*).²⁴ This collective society does not know the autonomy of reason.

Indeed, Kant made it clear that the introduction of the bourgeois Mine-and-Yours property and ownership distinction resulted from an autonomous rationality that decided about the distribution of wealth in an a priori manner. This was done without any regard for the corporeal well-being of specific members of its society: "But the distributing law of the Mine and Yours [*das austeilende Gesetz des Mein und Dein*] with regard to the individual's possession of land can . . . issue from nothing else but an *original* and in an a priori manner united will [*einem ursprünglich und a priori vereinigten Willen*], and can therefore only result from a bourgeois state of affairs [*nur im bürgerlichen Zustande*]."²⁵ This first "originally" and a priori united will of a bourgeois society contrasts with the "original" state of a "natural" collective community whose members are mainly anxious about the equal distribution of land. The introduction of autonomous reason goes hand in hand with the foundation of an early capitalist state. We will see that, in a manner similar to that whereby Hegel (see chapter 2) stigmatized Judaism as reenforcement of religious naturalism, Kant depicted the "Jewish nation" in terms of a "natural" society that did not distinguish possessions according to a bourgeois Mine-and-Yours ownership and property distinction.

As a result, the laws issuing from autonomous reason counteract such a "natural" state of happiness by introducing the nonempirical notion of property. According to Kant, "happiness [*Glückseligkeit*] comprises everything (and nothing more than that), which nature has given us; virtue [*Tugend*], however, means that which humanity can either give itself or take away from itself."²⁶ Happiness thus refers to corporeal well-being, whereas ethics, as Kant pointed out in his first *Critique*, has "nothing else" as "motivation [*Bewegungsgrund*]" but the *worthiness of attaining happiness* [*Würdigkeit, glücklich zu sein*]."²⁷ This state of worthiness does not coincide with the experience of happiness. We will see how Kant associated this wish for the actual welfare of the body with the "Pharisees," an expression that in eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century German discourse came to describe metonymically the essence of Jewishness.²⁸

In what is important for Walter Benjamin's reading of Kant's moral philosophy as the theoretical foundation of a "religion of capitalism" (see chap-

ter 10), autonomous law justified the unequal distribution of land. Crucially, the evaluation of money in the *Metaphysics of Morals* illustrates this fusion of ethical and political concerns. Kant depicted money as a convincing illustration of the metaphysical as the formal and nonempirical. Here we have reached the point where morality, politics, and epistemology meet. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, Kant redefined metaphysics as pure reason's independence from both empirical and supernatural conditions. First, Kant rejected forms of exchange involving empirical objects such as gifts. Second, Kant evaluated money as constitutive of the metaphysical doctrine of law (*metaphysische Rechtslehre*)²⁹ because it transcends any material transfer and operates in purely formal terms: "the notion of money [*der Begriff des Geldes*] . . . abstracts away from the material of economic traffic [*von der Materie des Verkehrs*] . . . *abstrahiert*."³⁰ Thus, the monetary economic constitution of an early capitalist society upheld, in Kant's view, an ethical system founded on autonomous reason. Just as money abstracts away from the particular quality of objects in the external world, virtue should disregard any empirical conditions that might interfere with the commandments of autonomous reason. To this extent, the monetary system of an early capitalist society helps the work of a type of practical reason that directs the will to action away from all the sensuous impulses to which it has been inclined in the first—"natural"—place.

Kant thus established a binary opposition between law and inclination (*daß er wohltue, nicht aus Neigung, sondern aus Pflicht*).³¹ The Kantian ideal of autonomy has a significant bearing on this opposition between "duty" (*Pflicht*) and "inclination" (*Neigung*). He defined autonomy as abstract movement away from the worldly, in radical polarity to heteronomy as the movement toward empirical objects. Receptivity to the particularity of different material entities constitutes the law of heteronomy. As we have seen, the first critique set out to prove that we were unable to perceive the distinctive character of things, since the "thing in itself" did not lie behind or hidden within the thing, as traditional metaphysics had claimed. Rather, it belonged to the sphere of human self-consciousness. On the epistemological level, which determines the moral one, heteronomy therefore amounts to self-deception.

Within this epistemological and sociopolitical context, Kant targeted the Jew as the embodiment of the heteronomous. As the manifestation of heteronomy, the Jew was not only the opposite of the Christian, who was defined in terms of autonomous reason. More important, he also represented the stranger in a Kantian civil society, whose very laws presupposed an autonomous state of indetermination by objects of empirical reality (see below). How did Kant arrive at such a derogatory equation between heteronomy and Jewishness? On one hand, he seemed to focus on what he perceived to be Judaism and, on the other, he employed the term *nation*, thus referring to the

Jews as a social and ethnic community. As we will see, this concern with the religion of the Jews had a political dimension. Indeed, Kant came to the conclusion that Judaism was a religion without religion.

Before he aligned the Jews with the political, an odd notion of censure in a philosopher so much concerned with the body politic, Kant maintained that Christianity does not have Jewish foundations. This pseudotheological move went in tandem with his attempted secularization and politicization of Christianity's otherworldly elements. To this end, the following analysis traces the extent to which Kant implicitly secularized and politicized the Christian ideal of overcoming the worldly. At the same time he enunciated a transcendental body politic in which the individual had to renounce the principle of heteronomy precisely by forsaking any heteronomous relation to the material basis of the external world. This was made abundantly clear when, in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he proclaimed Jesus to be a revolutionary hero who devalORIZED Judaism's priests and ceremonial statutes, thus introducing both a "moral attitude" (*moralische Gesinnung*) and a "public revolution" (*eine öffentliche Revolution*).³² Jesus brought about "in his own lifetime a public revolution (in religion), by overthrowing a morally repressive ceremonial faith and the authority of its priests."³³ What did Kant mean by the phrase "public revolution (in religion)"? He underlined *public* and put *religion* in parentheses so as to emphasize the political significance of this "religious" revolution.

In this context, Christ's body on the cross stood in for the body that had been translated into the body politic. Kant depicted Jesus as a revolutionary whose truth consisted not in the particular and exemplary form of his life but in the rejection, symbolized by the cross, of all worldly existence. The cross functioned as an example only in the sense of a transcendental idea, since his death opened the door to freedom for everyone who, like Jesus, wanted to die away from any orientation to earthly life. This sacrificial understanding of freedom impinged on the moral constitution of the body politic. Kant cited the Christian notion of "the freedom of the children of heaven and the bondage of a mere son of the earth"³⁴ only to secularize and politicize this otherworldly principle as follows:

However, the good principle [that of the freedom of the children of heaven] did not descend among humans from heaven at one particular time but from the very beginning of the human race, in some invisible way . . . and has precedence of domicile in humankind by right. And, since the principle appeared in an actual human being as example for all others, this human being "came unto his own, and his own received him not, but as many as received him, to them he gave the power to be called the sons of God, even to them that

believe on his name"; that is, by exemplifying this principle (in the moral idea) that a human being opened the doors of freedom to all who, like him, choose to die to everything that holds them fettered to earthly life to the detriment of morality.³⁵

Kant quoted John 1:11–12 only to appropriate the image of a divine human being for his political and moral theory. Christ showed that the "freedom of God's children" could be realized within the immanent realm of a body politic that functioned along the lines of a secularized principle of world-transcendence. Kant used the "moral idea" of Christ's sacrifice as an explanation for the absolute authority of autonomous reason. Like Christ, everyone should "die away" (*absterben*) from the happiness of the sensuous, which interferes with the commandments of a completely detached rationality.

Thus, in Kant's understanding, religion preconditioned both the moral and the political mind-set of a nation. This had major implications for the debate about Jewish civil equality that became quite intense in German-speaking culture at the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, in his treatise *Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews* (1781), Christian Wilhelm von Dohm made religion the touchstone by which state officials could judge the moral character of the Jews: "It would have to be clearly proved that the religion of the Jews contains such antisocial principles [that is, as alleged by anti-Semites], that their divine laws are contrary to the laws of justice and charity, if one were to justify before the eyes of reason that the rights of citizenship should be withheld entirely from the Jew, and that he should be permitted only partially to enjoy the rights of man."³⁶ Dohm equivocated on the issue of Judaism's possible moral deficiency: "Either his [the Jew's] religion contains nothing contrary to the duties of a citizen, or such tenets can easily be abolished by political and legal regulations."³⁷ Dohm's treatise exemplifies how in the sociopolitical context of late eighteenth-century German discourse religion served as touchstone by which one could assess the moral worth of a specific "national character."

If Dohm (and his fellow reformers)³⁸ either seemed to argue for the moral implacability of Judaism or appeared to have conceded to anti-Semites that there are some immoral but easily amended aspects of it, Kant wholeheartedly embedded both morality and rationality within a secular culture that obfuscates its Christian foundations. In an unacknowledged but implicit mode, he argued in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* that Christianity prepared the ground for a body politic in which autonomous reason set the standard for a moral system based on the demand for the realization of the otherworldly in this world. He opposed this otherworldly principle of freedom to "the prince of this world" (*Fürsten dieser Welt*),³⁹ whom he equated with "Jewish theocracy":

[I]n this government [Jewish theocracy] the subjects remained attuned in their minds to no other incentive except the goods of this world and only wished, therefore, to be ruled through rewards and punishments in this life—nor were they in this respect capable of other laws except such as were in part imposed by burdensome ceremonies and observances . . . and the inferiority of the moral disposition was in no way at issue—so this institutional order did no substantial injury to the realm of darkness but only served to keep ever in remembrance the imprescriptible right of the first proprietor.⁴⁰

Kant's equation of both Judaism and "the Jewish nation" with theocracy, of course, appropriated the main tenet of the third chapter in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*. Spinoza "makes Jewish history—and, following it, human history at large—a thoroughly *secular* phenomenon determined by rational and natural causes alone."⁴¹ Spinoza in fact wrote that in return for the Jews' "obedience" to God's commandments "the Law promises them nothing other than the continuing prosperity of their state and material advantages."⁴² He did not, however, pass judgment on such worldly considerations. On the contrary, he went on to point out that these are "not surprising, for the purpose of an organised society and state . . . is to achieve security and ease."⁴³ As we have seen, Kant secularized Christianity's otherworldly orientations, thus turning the Christian into the foundation stone of a rational body politic in which all members strive to enact their freedom from empirical conditions. Spinoza, on the other hand, did not argue for a secularization of religious values. Rather, he maintained that Judaism in its first phase, in which the state was clearly separated from religion,⁴⁴ set an example for the rest of humanity. When Kant used the pejorative term "goods of this world," he implicitly referred to Spinoza's conception of a secular society.⁴⁵

What has so far been overlooked, however, is that Kant embedded this critique of a thoroughly secular state in a secularized, that is, pseudotheological discourse. Kant's writing about Judaism as "religion without religion" had a highly prejudicial tone mainly because he made the "right religion," Christianity, the cornerstone of a rational body politic. In this way, he deprived Spinoza's political discourse of any ethical foundation. Indeed, he depicted "the Jewish nation" in terms of a primordial, "natural" state, in short, as "a realm of darkness." The reference to the "first proprietor" in the quotation above of course was to the "old Adam," that is, to a "primitive" stage of humanity.

Kant drew on Paul's theological concept of the old and the new Adam by casting it into a moralistic and, at the same time, political mold. Whereas "old Adam" traditionally referred to the Jews' disbelief in Christ, Kant secularized this image when he quoted Colossians 3: 9–10. Here he turned the "new

Adam" into the politico-ethical notion of justice: "Now conversion is an exit from evil and an entry into goodness, 'the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new,' since the subject dies unto sin (and thereby also the subject of all inclinations that lead to sin) in order to live unto justice."⁴⁶ At this point Kant clearly engaged in a move from the theological (old versus new Adam) via the moral (evil versus good) to the political (justice). Crucially, he employed the phrase to "die away from" (*absterben*), an expression that belongs to the cognitive field to which the notion of euthanasia appertains. Pointing to *The Conflict of Faculties* (1798), he infamously wrote about the "euthanasia of Jewishness" (*Euthanasie des Judentums*).⁴⁷ A purified form of morality would bring about such a dying away: "The euthanasia of Judaism is pure moral religion, freed from all the ancient statutory teachings, some of which were bound to be retained in Christianity (as a messianic faith)." (*Die Euthanasie des Judentums ist die reine moralische Religion, mit der Verlassung aller Satzungslehren, deren einige doch im Christentum [als messianischen Glauben] noch zurück behalten bleiben müssen.*)⁴⁸ Judaism as a messianic faith points to the Kantian and, as we will see, German idealist conflation of the Jewish religion with the Jewish nation. In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he advanced the strange claim that "Judaism as such, taken in its purity, entails absolutely no religious faith."⁴⁹ Having no religious faith, "Judaism . . . would still be left with the political faith (which pertains to it by essence)" (*der [wesentlich zu ihm gehörige] politische Glaube*).⁵⁰ Christianity's "immutable, pure religious faith" (*unveränderlichen, reinen Religionsglauben*)⁵¹ stood in stark contrast to the "religion of the Jews," which, as pure politics, defined their "essential and immutable" national character.

We thus arrive at a notion of immutability via a pseudotheological discussion about the essence of Christianity, whose construction seems to depend on its oppositional correlation to a fantasized image of a Jewish national character. Indeed, Kant went so far in his belief in an immutable Jewish national character that he disinherited the Jews of the complex ethical systems and narrations developed in the Hebrew Bible: "The *Jewish faith*, as originally established, was only a collection of merely statutory laws supporting a political state; for whatever moral additions were *appended* to it, whether original or later, do not in any way belong to Judaism as such."⁵² The verb *anhängen* ("to append") describes a process by which something alien is attached to another entity. Thus, an ethical kind of commonwealth constitutes the immutable opposite of Kant's posited Jewish national character.

How did Kant try to verify his fantasy about Jewish immutability? Significantly, Kant, and Hegel as well (see chapter 2), used the term *race* only to make little of its significance. True to his Enlightenment and modernizing aspirations, he emphasized the common source of the whole of humanity and thereby explicitly rejected a potential focus on racial difference. In this re-

spect, Kant disregarded the divergence between different people (*unerachtet ihrer Verschiedenheiten*) by emphasizing the common root from which every ethnic group develops (*einen einzigen Stamm*).⁵³ He clung to a cultural (in the sense of pseudotheological) notion of immutability that disregarded environmental factors: "Though Kant emphasized the common origin of all men, to avoid attacking the biblical account of creation, he nevertheless formulated a concept of race which would remain constant. Racial make-up becomes an unchanging substance and the foundation of all physical appearances and human development, including race."⁵⁴ In this way, Kant developed a notion of racial immutability without reference to pseudobiology. He set out to substantiate his notion of a "Jewish essence" with recourse to the image of an inseparable tie that bound the Jews immutably to Jehovah.

This is what he meant by the expression "messianic (or political) faith." It described the Jews as "a people especially chosen by Jehovah for himself" (*als ein besonders vom Jehovah für sich auserwähltes Volk*).⁵⁵ In the introduction we saw how this topos of an immutable tie between the Jewish God and his people informed the pseudotheological notion of immutability in the anti-Semitic writings of Feuerbach and Schopenhauer. This pseudotheological notion anticipated the pseudobiological element of "racial contagion" insofar as it involved the image of Christianity at risk of being "infected" by a "messianic faith."⁵⁶ In order to emphasize his fear of scriptural infection, Kant interpreted Mendelssohn's refusal to convert to Christianity as an exhortation to the Christians, functioning as a red flag warning of a potential loss of "Christian essence." Kant stated, "[B]y [the refusal to convert, Mendelssohn] apparently meant to say: Christians, first get rid of the Judaism in *your own* faith, and then we will give up ours."⁵⁷ This is precisely what Kant set out to do in his moral philosophy and rational theology. He attempted to remove Christianity's Judaic foundations. He did so by endowing Christian scripture with a radically anti-Jewish meaning.

As I have shown elsewhere, Kant reversed Paul's spirit-letter opposition so as to define Christianity as a revolution, as a conception that breaks radically with Judaism.⁵⁸ This reversal has major implications for the perception of both the corporeal and the Jewish. Kant often conflated the two, as we have seen. Kant's definition of morality as a dispassionate relation to the external world was a precondition for this reversal. It is the letter that became, in Kant's interpretation, devalued as the contingent, the material, the changeable, and the impure. In Kant's reading the letter signified, accordingly, the materially concrete, whereas the spirit denoted freedom from the corporeal as autonomous reason. Of particular importance in relation to Wagner's equation of Jewishness with his operas' narrative foundation (see chapter 3) is that Kant equated the letter with narrativity and concrete, empirical, and ever-changing "actions" (*Handlungen*), whereas the spirit denoted abstract and static "attitudes" (*Gesinnungen*).⁵⁹ Thus, the Pauline spirit, that which gives

life, turned into the letter that kills. This is so because Kant's *Geist* commanded complete separation from material life. In his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant argued that the letter signified any "motivating force" (*Triebfeder*) external to the unquestionable and static laws established by pure reason, be it "charity" (*gutherziger Instinkt*) or "compassion" (*Mitleiden*).⁶⁰ The spirit, by contrast, denoted morality as the following of the law for the law's sake, free from any other motivating force (*er beobachtet es [das Gesetz] dem Geiste nach . . . darin, daß dieses allein zur Triebfeder hinreichend sei*).⁶¹ In a further elaboration, Kant based his spirit-letter opposition in terms of a fundamental divide between the "physical" (*physisch*) and the "moral" (*moralisch*),⁶² thus radically rejecting the spiritual validity of the corporeal and contradicting Paul's notion of the spirit as taking care of the body.⁶³

It becomes clear on examination that by reversing Paul's spirit-letter opposition Kant attempted to erase Christianity's Jewish origins. To demonstrate this development, I must mention a further Kantian dichotomy. A legality-morality opposition in the *Metaphysics of Morals* paralleled his spirit-letter polarity in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.⁶⁴ Like the letter, the law is driven by motivating forces outside the sphere of a static understanding of law. Here, Judaism is situated reductively within the "legalistic." The target of Kant's reversal of Paul's spirit-letter opposition was in fact the oral law of the Pharisees, which he associated with the empirical, letter-like principle of happiness. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he criticized the Pharisean watchword according to which law could be reinterpreted if it would help save human lives:

Woe to them who have crawled through the snaky curves of the doctrine of happiness [*Glückseligkeitslehre*] in order to find something, which through the advantage which it holds out as a promise, frees them from punishment, if only by a small degree, according to the Pharisean watchword: "it is better that one man dies than that the whole people perish." For if justice [*Gerechtigkeit*] decline, then there is no value in human lives on earth.⁶⁵

Here Kant compared the political (in the sense of worldly or "messianic") principle of happiness with the politico-ethical notion of justice. The law follows the workings of autonomous reason. This kind of justice then forms the foundations of a secularized Christian body politic in which the otherworldly has turned immanent.

Radicalizing his argument, Kant interpreted Judaism as "materialistic" and so, according to his interpretative framework, Jewish law emerges as being oriented toward the "goods of this world" (*Güter dieser Welt*).⁶⁶ Kant thus counterposed Christology as the purely spiritual, in the sense of the ab-

stract, as a radical opposition to Judaism as the letter, in the sense of the material. As we have seen, Christ appeared as the revolutionary who attempted to overturn Judaism as the religion of "slavery." Here again Kant developed Pauline imagery only to subvert its connotations. As Daniel Boyarin has shown, in Paul, "'slavery' is the benevolent and beneficial slavery of the child. It is for his own good."⁶⁷ In Paul, slavery functioned as a metaphor for the paternal guidance with which God directs the Jews. In Kant, however, slavery meant oppression and bondage. Worse still, the word *Sklavensinn* has essentialist overtones meaning "the mind-set of a slave."⁶⁸

To this extent, Kant's reversal of Paul's spirit-letter opposition spilled over into his anthropological thinking. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant labeled the Jews "Palestinians who live amongst us"⁶⁹ and thereby exposed their exclusion from his "universal" and "non-dogmatic" philosophy. As Slavoj Žižek has recently pointed out, "the basic operation of ideology is not only the dehistoricizing gesture of transforming an empirical object into the eternal condition (women, Blacks . . . are by nature subordinated, etc.), but also the *opposite* gesture of transposing the a priori closure/impossibility of a field into an empirical obstacle."⁷⁰ This has major implications for the analysis that I am advancing in the present study. If Kant labeled the Jews "Palestinians who live amongst us," he stigmatized them as "Orientals" who are literally living next door.

This unarticulated level of Kant's philosophy describes what I have called his pseudotheology (see the introduction). Kant did not explicitly articulate the fact that he developed his social theory in a quasi-religious mode. Instead, he secularized and politicized aspects of Christian theology without critically reflecting on his undertaking. This lack of self-reflection bespeaks a loss of consciousness. In order to fully define the formal structure of his philosophy (autonomy, reason, morality, and freedom), Kant almost unconsciously fantasized about the Jews as its opposite. In doing so, he posited Judaism as an abstract principle that does nothing else but, paradoxically, desire the consumption of material goods. Here Kant unconsciously articulated his anxiety about a growing capitalist society, which he consciously celebrated as social instantiation of rationality (the Mine-and-Yours distinction as social and political realization of the principle of autonomy). Capitalist modes of labor, in fact, operate along the lines of an autonomous paradigm. The worker produces goods for the sake of production.⁷¹ Capitalist growth consists in this seemingly endless increase of productivity. In capitalism, value is constituted by this autonomous principle of "production for the sake of production." Value thus subsumes concrete labor under a general category that abstracts away from the social utilization of the fruits of labor. Kant associated the Jews with this consumption of worldly goods. In so doing he unconsciously voiced his fears about the potential corruption of capitalism into materialism.

Why did Kant orientalize European Jews? This question may be ad-

dressed by a brief discussion of the particular historical context in which Kant developed his moral philosophy. Attention to this discourse brings into focus the pseudotheology to which Kant referred in order to give content to his autonomy-heteronomy divide. Like many other philosophical systems, the Kantian autonomy-heteronomy divide at one level constitutes a purely formal aspect of his architectonic. Yet at another, more unarticulated level, Kant exemplified this universal formality with reference to a particular historical and religious context. He thereby developed a rather static and essentialist notion of the Jewish as the "heteronomous" in direct opposition to the "rational" as the secularized Christian idea of autonomy from empirical (worldly) determinations. Whereas this dehistoricizing gesture moved in an abstract sphere—correlated to the abstraction implicit in the autonomy-heteronomy opposition—Kant targeted the Jews as the empirical obstacle to the establishment of a rational order in which heteronomy would be overcome.

The political aspect of his pseudotheological exclusion of Judaism from both Christian religion and a "modern," that is, "rational" body politic comes clearly to the fore in his *Anthropology*, where he called the Jews "a nation of cheaters" (*eine Nation von Betrügern*). In doing so, he reconstructed a group of people who value their interests in empirical life more highly than approximating the conceptual truth laid down by civil society. The Jews, in Kant's view, did not respect the property and monetary regulations that proscribe material gain—as enacted by cheating. Indeed, he attributed the causes of cheating to the religion that shapes the mentality of the Jews. Hence Kant maintained that on account of their "superstition" (*Aberglaube*), they did not seek civil honor (*keine bürgerliche Ehre sucht*).⁷² Instead, they tried to make up for such a lack by outwitting the people who offer them security (*sondern dieser ihren Verlust durch Vorteile und Überlistung des Volks, unter dem sie Schutz finden . . . ersetzen wollen*).⁷³ This may indicate that the connection between the rather essentialist definition of the Jews as cheaters in his *Anthropology*, his discussion of Jewish law in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* is not as slim as it might first appear. Indeed, the anthropological account emphasized the focus on a social group. This is the same as in the larger corpus of his transcendental philosophy, where Kant depicted the Jews as a group that has followed not the path of transcendental freedom but that of enslavement to the material world.

The essentialist depiction of the Jews as a group is anti-Semitic insofar as it stigmatizes them as the nonmoderns in the sense of nontranscendentalists and insofar as it depicts them as corrupting the body politic. Kant's concern was not with a medical, pseudoscientific account of Jewishness. For example, he argued that the Jews had had a "moral epoch" (*das jüdische Volk in seiner gesitteten Epoche*) in which Moses—with a completely negative view of the empirical and the sensuous (*in Ansehung des Sinnlichen gänzlich negativ*)—introduced the prohibition against images.⁷⁴ Thus Kant's anti-Semitism had

little in common with the pseudoscientific account in circulation at the end of the nineteenth century, or so it seems. He focused on social normativity rather than on the "biological." Yet it was this emphasis on the body politic that constituted a modernization of the old—more religiously focused—Jew-hatred. In his account of the body politic, Kant fantasized about the Jews as figures of corruption. In sociohistorical terms, Kant here unconsciously voiced his anxiety about capitalism's "descent" into materialism.

Thus Kant's philosophical anthropology anticipated political anti-Semitism, which the supposed objectivity of pseudoscientific writing served to substantiate. Although Kant did not engage in a crude discourse about bodily functions, he did depict the Jews as being socially—rather than medically—conditioned toward the material.⁷⁵ Kant's views concerning Judaism, whether in his *Anthropology*, *Metaphysics of Morals*, or *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, are consistent in a negative manner. By means of this construction of a group that chose to be heteronomous, he accounted for the fact that, although the ability to transcend the empirically intuited world resides in every human being, it needs to be socially enforced. It depends on social normativity and, as a result, autonomy presupposes a civil society that metaphysically prescribes freedom from materialistic inclinations.

In a further move, Kant linked the body politic to religion, arguing that the inability to participate in a bourgeois civil society based on the Mine-and-Yours property and ownership distinction was reducible to the superstition of the Jews.⁷⁶ Thus, *Kant grounded the immutability of the Jews in their religion*. But what exactly did he mean when he labeled the Jews superstitious? Crucially, he defined superstition in terms of reason's subjection to external facts (*die gänzliche Unterwerfung der Vernunft unter Facta*),⁷⁷ that is, to the principle of heteronomy. In Kant's view, superstition is irrational because it does not restrict the use of reason to reason's (autonomous) self-rule but instead orients rational activity toward that "which it can justify by *objective grounds* and dogmatic conviction."⁷⁸ Thus, by calling the Jews superstitious, Kant defined rational autonomy as freedom from both the empirically and the religiously given, over and against the Judaic, which he characterized as the heteronomous, as the superstitious and the irrational. In this way, Kant excluded the Jews from his transcendental scheme.

It was owing to the heteronomously oriented religion of the Jews that their bodies could not be transformed into a body politic grounded in autonomy. As we have seen, in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant posited the goods of this world (*Güter dieser Welt*) as the motivating force behind the "mental disposition" (*Gemüter*) of the Jews.⁷⁹ According to Kant, cheating resulted from their religion, which served as a justification for barring them from entry into a civil society whose laws prescribed transcendental independence from determination by worldly motivating forces. As has been discussed in this chapter, the Kantian notions of reason and freedom

modernized the old Christian Jew-hatred in philosophical-religious as well as in political-anthropological terms.⁸⁰ Thus, according to Kant's anti-Semitic fantasy, it was the religion of the Jews that positioned them as the immutable other of a body politic based on the transcendental indifference to empirical objects. Significantly, it was only such indifference that enabled rational will's acceptance of the Mine-and-Yours property and ownership distinction.

What was revolutionary about this distinction? It was not the distinction as such. Rather, it was the transcendental turn with which Kant imbued it. He did so in such a way that it prepared the ground for a "modernized" notion of the body politic. Now an unequal distribution of wealth made the members of bourgeois civil society implicitly subscribe to autonomy insofar as they respected the regulations that did not make the earth everyone's possession and thereby arbitrarily restricted access to "the goods of this world." Kant's transcendental paradigm could likewise be used as the theoretical underpinning of a communitarian and socialist body politic, as was the case in the work of Feuerbach and the young Hegelians whom Wagner read in his revolutionary period, shortly before writing his infamous "Judaism in Music" of 1850.